



NEWS

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USDA ANNOUNCES SOIL SURVEY WEBSITE
Internet-based System Allows Users Access to Soil Survey Information

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa.—Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns recently announced the launch of a USDA Web Soil Survey site that will provide secure public access to the national soils information system. This site is a simple yet powerful way to access and analyze soils data that contributes to every aspect of public and private land use and development.

“Soil surveys are the foundation for land conservation activities as well as private and commercial land development,” said Johanns. “Soil survey maps help to enable agricultural producers, conservationists, engineering firms, county and city planners, and others to make informed decisions concerning land use. Posting soil survey information on the internet is one more step in our effort to make information more accessible to the citizens we serve.”

Soil surveys began in 1899 as part of the nation’s earliest efforts on behalf of cooperative conservation. Known as the National Cooperative Soil Survey, it has evolved into a partnership of state and federal agencies working together to collect, classify, interpret and provide soils information.

“As a landowner and farmer, I never bought a piece of land unless I consulted a soil survey map,” said Bruce Knight, Chief of USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). “This simple but critical step is often the difference between profit and loss when it comes to land use and conservation activities and I am very pleased to deliver internet access to the public.”

The website has been designed with three easy to use features—Define, View and Explore and operates much like internet sites that provide locator and directional information. When viewers visit the web soil survey, they are asked to “Define” a geographic area of interest by selecting a state and county or just by highlighting an area or areas. Once a location has been defined and projected on the screen, the viewer has the choice to print the map and related information, save it to their hard drive or download the data for use in a geographic information system (GIS).

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The viewer also can “Explore” the designated location for specific soils data giving the viewer important information on soil suitability in relationship to usage. This flexibility provides the viewer an opportunity to build a customized report that addresses the viewer’s individual needs. Information can be delivered in a variety of formats to include print, CD, DVD or other media.

Prior to today’s launch all soil survey maps were printed and bound into soil survey books that were free to the public at local USDA Service Centers, NRCS field offices and public libraries. The once familiar soil survey publications will be phased out slowly and the federal government’s initiative of electronic government information (eGov) will replace the printed publications through the use of this site.

Currently, NRCS has soils maps and data available online for more than 95 percent of the nation’s counties and anticipates having 100 percent in the near future. The site will be updated and maintained online as the single authoritative source of soil survey information.

To view the website go to <http://soils.usda.gov/survey>.

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